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# Royal adultery and illegitimacy: moral and political issues raised by the story of Utherpandragon and Ygerne in the French rewritings of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.)

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British Library

In the widely spread *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (1138),<sup>1</sup> which survives in about 200 manuscripts, Merlin's magic helps King Utherpandragon to fulfill his love for the duchess of Tintagel, by giving him the duke's appearance. Ygerne is deceived, but this union eventually leads to the conception of Arthur. The episode has been discussed in relation with its sources: according to E. Faral, the story could be inspired by the love of Jupiter, who with the help of Mercury takes the shape of Amphitryon to deceive his wife Alcmena, who gives birth to Hercules.<sup>2</sup> For L. Mathey-Maille, the story of the conception of Arthur could come from a legendary or folkloric source from Celtic origins with a later moralising addition of a biblical reference.<sup>3</sup> The passage has also been analysed through mythical structures like the three Dumézilian indo-european functions which involve fertility, war and religion. J. Grisward has shown that in order to lie with Ygerne, Uther successively offers her gold and jewelry, engages in military conflict, and eventually resorts to magic.<sup>4</sup> Politically, because of Merlin's essential participation and privileged connection with the supernatural, Uther cannot assume alone a full sovereignty, but he needs Merlin's assistance.<sup>5</sup> The change brought by the author of the prose *Merlin* to the story of Arthur's conception makes it fit even better with the myth of the hero's birth examined by O. Rank:<sup>6</sup> after an extraordinary birth, and an obscure childhood, the hero makes a triumphant come back and becomes king.

This paper will examine the adaptation and variations at work in the later French or Anglo-Norman rewritings of this episode within the chronicles tradition. The corpus includes Wace's *Brut* (1155),<sup>7</sup> based on the first variant version of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*,<sup>8</sup> but also a wider range of later adaptations, in verse and in prose, which have otherwise been little studied. The story, retold in the Anglo-Norman prose *Bruts*, was widely spread in England from the 14<sup>th</sup> c. onwards,<sup>9</sup> with Peter of Langtoft's *Chronicle*,<sup>10</sup> John of Canterbury's *Polistorie*,<sup>11</sup> Anglo-Norman genealogical rolls of the kings of Britain, Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica*.<sup>12</sup> On the Continent, the 13<sup>th</sup> c. prose romance of *Merlin*<sup>13</sup> considerably expands the episode,<sup>14</sup> but is not used as a source for the later Arthurian chronicles. The *Chroniques des Bretons*,<sup>15</sup> an anonymous translation of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, were written at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century at the court of Burgundy.<sup>16</sup>

The relation between Utherpandragon and Ygerne does not follow a typical situation associated with the development of courtly love.<sup>17</sup> All the adaptations of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* involve Merlin's magic tricks in the satisfaction of the sovereign's will and desire, at the expense of a deceived woman. As Claude Buridant reminds us, medieval translation is never literal (except for the Bible) but tends to transmit the deep meaning of a text, rather than its form, which can involve glossing it, and induces all kinds of choices, additions and transformations.<sup>18</sup> Examining the textual and narrative choices of the chronicles and including the visual dimension of genealogical rolls, I will study how different strategies of translation and rewriting of the Galfridian material, acknowledge and deal with the ethical problem raised by the story of Uther and Ygerne, questioning the use of magic by the character of Merlin and the implications of adultery in terms of royal succession and legitimacy.

Merlin's problematic use of magic: from enchantments to necromancy

From a moral perspective, Uther's adultery with Ygerne constitutes a problematic episode, despite the fact that it induces a better good in the conception of Arthur.<sup>19</sup> Ygerne is deceived by Merlin's trick, Uther's appearance and his duplicitous speech. Canon law allowed for the legitimization of an illegitimate child if his parents later contracted a valid

marriage.<sup>20</sup> But in the prose *Merlin*, Arthur is not acknowledged by Uther: he is given away by the king and becomes the foster son of Antor, under Merlin's supervision. As a result, Arthur is not recognized as the legitimate child of the royal couple, a key political and narrative aspect in the prose *Merlin* and its *Vulgate Sequel*.<sup>21</sup>

Merlin's magic powers result from his demonic ascendancy and magical conception, and although he uses them to serve the Kings of Britain, the circumstances of Arthur's conception and the use of human metamorphosis immediately cast a shadow on the morality of these practices. Merlin's magic allows Uther to take the appearance of Gorlois and thus deceive Ygerne and her men. His supernatural powers lead to varied degrees of emphasis, with appreciation or condemnation, in the different adaptations of the story. From a clerical perspective, powers of metamorphosis are highly suspicious in that shape-shifting is a diabolic attribute and reminds us of Merlin's demonic conception. He uses this gift repeatedly in the prose *Merlin*, but only once in the *Historia*, in this episode leading to the conception of Arthur. Merlin himself is the son of an incubus, a demon able to lie with a woman. Arthur's illegitimate conception by a transformed Uther is reminiscent of Merlin's,<sup>22</sup> and is as much the product of the king's as of Merlin's action.

For medieval theologians, metamorphosis was considered as sacrilegious in that while God created man in his own image,<sup>23</sup> the transformation was an appropriation of God's power: it changed the order of a perfect creation and established a discrepancy between being and appearance. The belief in metamorphosis was considered as the survival of pagan superstitions.<sup>24</sup> In the story of Uther and Ygerne, Merlin gives the king the appearance of Duke Gorlois (*dare tibi figuram Gorlois*) and takes himself another figure (*alia specie*, p. 187). The nouns 'figura' and 'species' both refer to a modification of the external shape of the characters, rather than to an inner change: their identity remains the same despite their outer transformation.<sup>25</sup> The *Historia* does not dwell on the magic performed by Merlin, but rather stresses its efficiency. Merlin uses new techniques (*utendum est tibi novis artibus*, p. 187),<sup>26</sup> including personal medicines or drugs (*medicaminis meis*) which give Uther, Ulfen and himself the appearance of Gorlois and his men, Jordan and Bretel. The First Variant version states more explicitly the use of magic:

Novi medicaminibus meis mutare hominum figuras ita ut per omnia is videatur similis esse cuius formam *arte magica* inpressero VV p. 134

[I learnt to change the aspects of men by my potions so that it is perceived by all as being similar to the shape of what I will reproduce through the magical art]

It highlights the role of Merlin in the transformation through the use of words from the family of (trans)-mutare: ‘mutare’, ‘transmutatus’, ‘transmutabo’ (p. 134).

Wace's *Brut* also stresses Merlin's prodigious gifts, and active role, detailing all the aspects of the transformation which give Uther ‘Le cors, le vis, la cuntenance / Et la parole e la semblance’ of Gorlois:

‘Mais jo te mettrai bien dedenz  
*Par nuvels medecinemenz;*  
*Figure d'une sai muer*  
*E l'un en l'autre tresturner,*  
*L'un faz bien a l'autre sembler*  
*Et l'un faiz bien a l'autre per’ [...]*  
*Merlin fist ses enchantemenz,*  
*Vīs lur mua e vestemenz. RB ll. 8701-28*

[‘But I will easily get you inside, using new potions: I know how to change a man's face so that one turns into another, the first seeming to be the second and the second identical to the first’. [...]. Merlin performed his enchantment and changed their faces and clothes.]

The use of the binary structure of the octosyllable, with the recurring use of the balancing ‘l'un... l'autre’, reinforces the idea of duplication. The transformation operated by Merlin is only external but it skillfully replicates the aspect and manner of speech of the characters involved, and even their clothing is matched. Variants in Wace's text express different attitudes towards Merlin's magical powers. Manuscript F, London, BL, Add. 32125, replaces line 8702, mentioning the

‘medicinenz’ used by Merlin, by ‘art’ and ‘enchantment’, highlighting his mastery of supernatural means. In manuscript P, BL, Add. 45103, Merlin reassures Uther about the efficiency of the transformation: ‘Ja n’i seras aperceüz / ne pur alter hume mescreüz’ (ll. 8721-22), but these lines are omitted in manuscripts D, Durham, Cathedral Library, C iv 27 (I) and L, Lincoln, Cathedral Library, 104,<sup>27</sup> maybe because they add moral ambiguity to the wizard’s behaviour.<sup>28</sup>

In the 14<sup>th</sup> c. *Scalacronica*, by Thomas Gray, Ulfyn praises for Uther Merlin’s art and knowledge (‘ly counsailla q’il feist quer Merlyn, *que de maynt art estoit sachaunt*’, f. 68b). As in Wace, an enchantment enables the transformation of Uther, providing him with Gorlois’ speech and composure: ‘[Merlin] dist sez enchaumentenz. Lor semblaunce fust al hor mue’ (f. 68va).

Despite this example, 14<sup>th</sup> century chroniclers seem more cautious than 12<sup>th</sup> century writers, omitting any direct reference to magical art or enchantment, even when they describe the transformations operated by Merlin. The Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* mentions Merlin’s ‘art’, but does not dwell on its exact nature, highlighting outer changes by the use of the word ‘figure’ and the systematic repetition of ‘semblance’ (meaning both appearance and deceit):

Merlin par sa *art* qil sauoit *changa la figure* le roi e sa *samblaunce* a la *semblaunce* le counte, e la *semblance* Vlfyn a la *semblaunce* Iordan Cadyn, e sa *semblaunce demene* a la *semblance* Bertel Barin. *PB* p. 154, ll. 1547-49

[Through the art he knew, Merlin changed the king’s appearance to the appearance of the earl, and the appearance of Ulfyn to the appearance of Jordan Cadyn, and his own appearance to the appearance of Bertel Barin.]

Peter of Langtoft was an Augustinian canon at Bridlington Priory in Yorkshire at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In his *Chronicle*, Merlin promises Uther ‘Le duk sire Gorloys te frai *ressembler*’, while Ulfyn and himself take the identity of Jordan and Bretel: ‘Ulfyn serra Jordan [...] E joe serra Britel’ (p. 138). Uther takes the appearance of the duke, ‘la *semblance* Gorloys si ad revestuz’ (p. 138), but the text does not explain how Merlin operates. Uther goes

twice to Ygerne in the shape of Gorlois, during the siege of Tintagel and after the duke's death and the defeat of his troops. The second time, the duchess understands that she has been abused and victim of an illusion: 'Tu m'as desceuz' (p. 140). After Ygerne agrees to marry him, Uther explains how he was able to lie with her. His confidence seems to assuage her: 'li counta coment / Of ly avayt jeu, dont ele fu meyns dolent' (p. 140), but it does not shed light on the use of magic and on the nature of Merlin's powers.

In the *Polistorie*, written around 1314 by the Benedictine monk of Christ Church, John of Canterbury, Merlin's wisdom allows him to perform the transformation ('Par mes *queintises* vous sai doner la *figure* Gorlois, ici ke en totes choses li *resemblerés*', 'Merlin [ad] lures *figures* changes', f. 17va-b). His knowledge seems to encompass his supernatural powers, as his military advice allows for the capture of the otherwise impregnable Tintagel ([Uther] se hasta oue se gens a Tintagel, si l'ad pris *par le conseil Merlyn* ke *par force nel ust ja cunquis*, f. 17vb). The *Anonimale chronicle*,<sup>29</sup> written in the diocese of York, is even more concise as it describes how Merlin uses 'medicines' to change the 'figure' and 'fourme' (f. 60) of Uther, Ulfin and himself.

By contrast with the texts who plainly refer to Merlin's art and describe his enchantments, even when they do not elaborate on them, other chronicles characterize Merlin's action as 'nigromance', black magic. Despite its concision, the *Petit Bruit*, written by Rauf de Boun, a Canon of St Paul's cathedral in London, for Henry de Lacy, earl of Lincoln, in 1309, gives a thorough account of Uther's relationship with Ygerne.<sup>30</sup> In this work, Uther's strategy, to summon his court in order to bring Ygerne close to him, is first depicted as an 'engyne' (p. 11), a cunning trick unworthy of a king, and later as a 'fauce cautele' (p. 12), a fallacious pretext. Contrary to Geoffrey (p. 185) and Wace (l. 8646), who say that the siege led by Uther lasts a week, and to the prose *Brut*, where it lasts two weeks (p. 12), in the *Petit Bruit*, the king stalls for more than two years (.ii. aunz et .iii. semeynis, p. 12), until the castle's supplies are exhausted, and the duke and his wife transfer from Tintagel to Bodmound. This extension stresses the resistance of the duke, highlighting the need for Merlin: 'Ne *unques* n'out le roy, ceo dit le *Bruit*, cele duchesse conquist, sy non par la *queyntyse* un Merleyne *nigramouciën* a l'hour, qi le *transfigure a la semblaunce* l'avantdit duk' (p. 12). Merlin, like Uther, is characterised by his cunning ('queyntyse'



and 'ongeyn'), but contrary to the 'enchantment' of Wace, 'nigromance' unequivocally designates black arts invoking the dead and evil spirits and draws us back to the character's demonic origin.<sup>31</sup>

The *Chroniques des Bretons*, a French translation for the Burgundian court of a Latin source considered as historical, is quite influenced by the French romance tradition.<sup>32</sup> The stylistic elaboration at work in the story of Uther and Ygerne probably fitted the tastes of a 15<sup>th</sup> c. lay and aristocratic audience interested in both narrative literature and lyric poetry who valued rhetorical ornaments in historical writings.<sup>33</sup> The passage relative to the transformation favours amplification and variety of expression in its description, using the nouns 'forme', 'figure', and 'espece', as well as derivatives of verbs of change ('muer') and perception ('sembler', 'paraître'):

A ceste chose parfaire nous convendra user de *soubtillite non acoustumee et des ars merueilleux* [...]. Je scay certaines choses par quoy je feray que tu auras proprement la *foume et figure* du duc Gorlois par telle maniere que tu le *ressembras* en toutes choses et se ainssy te plaist je *transmuieray* apres par *apparence* Ulphin, ton chevalier, en la *semblance* de Jourdain de Tintagol [...] et moy-meismes me feray *apparoir* estre tel que Briselle [...]. [Le roy] se soubmist es *ars ou cautelles* de Merlin, sy fut sans delay *transformez par lapparence en lespece ou samblance* du duc Gorlois, et Ulphin en Jourdain, et Merlin en Briselle, par telle *foume* que jamais ne feust congneu quilz ne feussent les dessus nommez, par *samblance de viaire et de contenances*. *CB* p. 337-38

[In order to achieve this, we will need to use an exceptional subtlety and marvellous arts. [...] I know things through which I will make you take the exact shape and figure of Duke Gorlois, so that you will look like him in every way, and if it pleases you, I will then change the appearance of your knight Ulfen in the likeness of Jourdain of Tintagel [...] and I will make myself appear like Briselle [...]. [The king] submitted himself to the art or cunning of Merlin, so that without delay his appearance was transformed in the form or likeness of Duke Gorlois, and Ulfen in Jourdain, and Merlin in Briselle, in such

a shape that it could never be realised that they were not those above mentioned, because of the appearance of their face and demeanour.]

Merlin's prodigious art is associated with subtlety ('soubtillite'), and cunning ('cautelle'), but this cleverness is also presented as devilish when at the end of the passage, Merlin's art is called 'ingromance' *CB* p. 342.<sup>34</sup> In this later text, the negative implications of Merlin's magic contrast with the more positive presentation of his supernatural gifts in Geoffrey and Wace and with the more neutral description of the transformations in the *Brut* chronicles. The magic operated by Merlin, depicted with ingenuity in Geoffrey, Wace, and Peter of Langtoft, leads to more cautious introductions in 14<sup>th</sup> century chronicles, while the *Petit Bruit* and *Chroniques des Bretons* do not hesitate to relate them to satanic arts. In the *Petit Bruit*, Merlin's involvement in the metamorphosis reminds the reader of his devilish origins and spreads the responsibility of the sin committed by the king. The abrupt end of the story, which falls back on the structure of the historical narrative, with a change to Arthur's reign, contrasts with *Merlin*, which develops the moral resolution of the story by the idea of a divine plan leading to the conception of Arthur and by the depiction of Uther's good death.

#### Royal adultery and the issue of illegitimacy

The suspicion related to Merlin's use of magic and transformation is not the only problem raised by the story of Uther and Ygerne. In the first Variant version of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the religious and moral background of Uther's adultery -lust being one of the seven deadly sins-, is more clearly stated than in the Vulgate version. At the beginning of the episode, the narrator alludes to the mythological representation of the goddess Discord raising evil passions among the guests and suggests an intervention of the Devil himself:

Sed quia in conuiuuiis tetra solet esse *libido insidatrix et inimica leticie*, nequaquam preterire uoluit *hostis humani* generis quin huic interesset conuiuio. VV p. 132

[But as there is usually among the guests a horrible desire, treacherous and hostile to the joy, the Enemy of the human species did not want at all to overlook the occasion brought by this banquet.]

The text also makes a parallel with the story of David and Bathsheba, attributing the origin of this passion to Satan. Considering that the First Variant usually tends to abridge the Vulgate version, these small additions show the author's interest for this passage and support the idea that details unique to the Variant version often lend it 'a tone more markedly pious or christianising than the Vulgate': as shown by Neil Wright, it has 'independent biblical borrowings' and 'additional religious emphasis or content'.<sup>35</sup>

Quam cum ex aduerso respexisset rex *tamquam David in Bersabee*, subito *Sathana* mediante incaluit et postpositis omnibus curam amoris sui totam in eam uertit...

VV p. 132

[Because the king, who was opposite her, was watching her, as David did Bathsheba, Satan inflamed him, and leaving aside everything else, David turned all his loving attention towards her.]

If Uther is clearly guilty of lechery and adultery, Arthur's illegitimacy is not entirely clear in the chronicles. In Wace in particular, there is certain confusion relative to the exact moment of the conception of Arthur,<sup>36</sup> because of the ambiguous use of the definite article in the second reference: 'Le reis ot mult Ygerne amee, / Senz ensuine l'ad espusee. / *La nuit* ot un fiz conceü...' (*RB* ll. 8813-15). If Arthur is conceived on the wedding night, rather than the night of the transformation and adultery (ll. 8733-34),<sup>37</sup> he is the legitimate fruit of a rightful union, a setting which removes the legal and political issues raised by illegitimacy. For Laurence Mathey-Maille, this duplication and the related confusion could come from an interference with the story of David and Bathsheba. The biblical couple's first son dies because it was conceived in sin (only later do they produce the future King Salomon, within the frame of their rightful marriage).<sup>38</sup>

The Variant version of the *Historia* does not mention Uther and Ygerne's reciprocal feelings, as in the Vulgate version, but it adopts a more legalistic perspective regarding their union. It stresses that the wedding is celebrated in a legitimate and magnificent manner (*Nuptiis igitur legitime atque magnifice celebratis*, p. 135). In a similar way, the prose *Merlin* does not dwell on Uther's passion for Ygerne but develops the legal issues related to Gorlois's abrupt departure from court, an unrepentant act of rebellion directly inspired by the personal outrage he endured on behalf of his wife. This text's interest for judicial matters appears in the long description of the peace negotiations following the death of the duke and leading to the wedding of the king and the widowed duchess (*M*, p. 196-261).

The judicial and moral aspect of the story reappears in the *Chroniques des Bretons*, though they are based on the Vulgate version of the *Historia*.<sup>39</sup> For Géraldine Veyseyre, the *Chroniques* make explicit the underlying moral and didactic teachings from Geoffrey's narrative, an explanatory perspective widespread in 15<sup>th</sup> c. historical literature.<sup>40</sup> As in Wace, Uther expresses both the will to redeem his sin and his enduring love for Ygerne. The allusion to his salvation suggests that the wedding enables an ethical, religious and judicial resolution of the episode:

Son ceur disoit: 'Maintenant auray-je ce que tant ay desire; maintenant sera comlee a moy *par la loy de mariage* Ygerne qui est mon seul confort et *le refuge de mon salut*'. *CB* p. 343

[His heart said: 'Now will I have all I had so much desired; now Ygerne, who is my only comfort and the shelter of my salvation, will be united with me through the wedding law'.]

The concern regarding Uther's adultery echoes the moral condemnation of the episode indicated by the Variant version of the *Historia*, but contrary to this text, it affects the conclusion rather than the introduction of the story. If the *Chroniques* elaborate on Uther's feelings for Ygerne, their moral ending enables the religious validation of a union started as a transgressive passion. The adultery is not publicly revealed and its perpetrator is the king himself, two factors which affect the way it is integrated in the history of the kings of Britain.<sup>41</sup> Even if the

author of the *Chronicles* is not a churchman, the study of this passage seems to confirm that he was characterised by his 'orthodox piety' and 'given to moralizing'.<sup>42</sup>

In the *Chroniques des Bretons*, as Merlin takes charge of the transformation, out of compassion and concern for the king, he endorses responsibility for the adultery, making it possible and allowing the conception of Arthur. The king does not seem entirely absolved by Merlin's intervention: Uther does not show any remorse for his actions but enjoys acting the part of the duke. During his night with Ygerne, he playfully endorses the role of the husband, expressing his love and concern to fool Ygerne and take advantage of her: 'Et sy la *decepoit* le roy par l'aournement ses paroles lesquelles *il faignoyt moult caultement*', p. 338. He internalises the cunning trick provided by Merlin. When the aggrieved messengers from Gorlois' camp arrive at Tintagel, Uther keeps acting in a joyful manner, delivering an elaborate speech where he promises Ygerne to start negotiations with the king. Uther expresses no culpability regarding the adultery. His grief for the death of the duke is quickly replaced by excitement at the possibility of now having Ygerne for himself.<sup>43</sup>

In the prose *Merlin*, the culpability of Merlin, Uther and Ulfín is more clearly stated:

*Ulfíns est auques bien quitez dou pechié que il ot des amors faire, mais je ne me sui mie aquitez dou pecié que j'ai de la dame et de l'engendreure que ele a dedanz soi, et si ne set de cui'. Et li rois respont: 'Vos estes si saiges et si prodom que vos vos en savroiz bien aquiter'. Et Merlins dist: 'Il convendra que vos m'aidez'. M p. 247*

[Ulfín is now well absolved of the sin of his involvement in the intercourse, but I am not absolved of my sin towards her in that she conceived a child and does not know whom it is from'. And the king answered: 'You are so wise and such a good man that you will know how to get absolved of it'. And Merlin replied: 'You will have to help me about this'.]

Ulfín's involvement is redeemed by his negotiation of the peace and wedding between Uther and Ygerne, but Merlin presents Uther's

abandoning of his illegitimate child as a way of clearing their sin, while he himself takes charge of the new born. The king's own culpability is not explicitly mentioned, but it is suggested by the need for him to share Merlin's penance. In the short version of *Merlin*, the character specifies that he is guilty of helping to deceive the lady: 'je ne me suis mie acquités del *pechié que je aïdai la dame a decevoir*' (Pl. p. 742).<sup>44</sup> Merlin only presents himself as an accessory to Uther who implicitly is the main actor of the deception. Nevertheless, the adultery is redeemed in that it allows, through the conception and rise of Arthur, the manifestation of God's plan.<sup>45</sup>

While in the Anglo-Norman *Brut*, Uther dies quickly of poisoning, the idea of penance is again more developed in *Merlin*, where Uther's sin and guilt are brought forward when he asks on this deathbed about the child he abandoned to Merlin (*M* p. 258). Encouraged by Merlin, the king distributes his treasures and gives alms, thus preparing for a good Christian death, and possibly redeeming his adultery with Ygerne.<sup>46</sup> Merlin witnesses this moral achievement and prophesies about Arthur's destiny: 'Tu as fait molt bele fin, se la conscience est tele come la semblance, et je te di que tes filz Artus sera chiés de ton roiaume après toi par la vertu Jhesu Crist...' (*M* p. 260). The match of 'conscience' and 'semblance' contrasts with the previous deception of Ygerne through the adoption of Gorlois's 'semblance'. A capital sin has been committed, but it may be expiated.

Adultery redeemed? The birth and reign of Arthur in chronicles and genealogies

Although some texts raise the question of Uther's sin of adultery, in many 14<sup>th</sup> century chronicles, Arthur's illegitimacy does not seem to be problematic. Like Anna, Arthur is above all presented as the king of Uther, and this paternity is sufficient to enable a smooth transmission of power. In Peter of Langtoft's *Chronicle*, Arthur's conception is presented as the result of a collective scheme involving the king and his counselors, including Merlin: 'La dame conceust la nouyt *par lour dayler* / Un fiz; quant fust nez Arthur le fist nomer' (p. 138). However, the end of the episode, with the wedding and the birth of Arthur, seems to put aside the question of the adultery and the use of the supernatural.

The conclusion shows Uther and his marriage in a very positive light: 'Le ray sustynt le regne en molt grant honur / E of dame Ingerne vesquit en amour' (p. 140). Peace and stability, associated to the conquest of Ygerne, succeed to the king's love sickness and to the ensuing schemes.

The *Petit Bruit* gives a very short conclusion to the episode, mentioning the conception of Arthur and the royal wedding: 'meyme cele nuit et par mesme cele ongeyn mena meyme cely Merlin le roy a la duchesse, et meyme cele nuit fut Artour engendré, *ceo dit le Bruit*, et puis l'esposa ly roys' (p. 12). The reference to the (grant) *Bruit* as a textual source stresses the importance of the passage in the light of Arthur's birth. The retelling of Arthur's conception works as a transition before the history of his reign.

In the *Polistorie*, the reference to Arthur's conception immediately highlights his glorious destiny, and despite the shadows surrounding his conception, narratorial interventions stress that Arthur is Uther's son ('Cele nuyt cunsust Igerne de Uther le renomé Arthur *ke après fist meynt honorable chevalerie, si estoit cremu e doté en totes teres cum ja mustray*', 'si engendra [Uther] en li [Ygerne] une file ke fust appelé Anne, mes *lur premiere engendrure, cum desuz est dist, fust Arthur*', f. 17va-b). The *Anonimalle Brut* also mentions both Arthur and Anna's conception ('s'en coucherent tute la nute ensemble, et mesme la nute ele [Ygerne] consut un enfant qe pus fut apelé Arthur'; 'Et puis la esposa et de ly après engendra une feill Ama nomé' f. 60v). Even if Arthur was conceived outside of marriage, his legitimacy is not questioned.

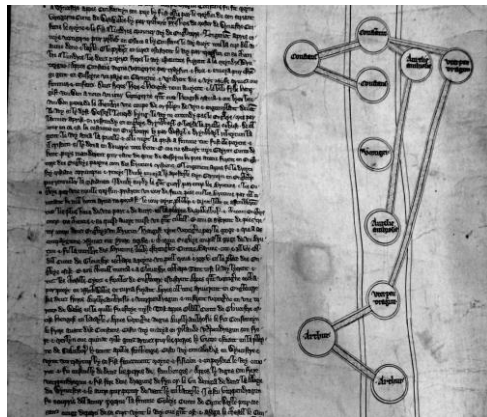


Figure 1: Oxford, Bodleian, Add. E 14

The Anglo-Norman genealogical rolls of the kings of Britain also stress the positive consequence of the adultery –the birth of Arthur. Oxford, Bodleian, Add. E 14 (early 14<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>17</sup> offers a synthetic but comprehensive summary: it evokes Uther's rapture for Ygerne, the circumstances of the duke's departure and the siege of Tintagel. Merlin's 'art' allows for the illegitimate conception of Arthur (whose name is introduced by two positive terms: '[Uther] parjut la cuntesse, si engendra le *noble beer* Arthur'); Gorlois' death finally enables the king to marry Ygerne. In this roll, the genealogy is structured on the right side by a diagram executed in red and brown ink containing the names of the successive British kings, with the commentary on the left side. Arthur features in two roundels, a double-entry system already set up by Matthew Paris and used above for King Constans. It is a common feature of genealogical rolls to represent twice the same character, first as son of a king, and then as sovereign, as if the acquisition of the royal dignity presented him with a new *persona*.



Figure 2: London, BL, Add. 8101



Two other genealogical rolls, London, College of Arms 20/5 (beg. 14<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>48</sup> and BL Add. 8101 (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.),<sup>49</sup> which contain the same version of the commentary, although their *mise en page* differs, also highlight Merlin's part in the adventure. The use of 'cointise', which echoes the earlier 'sacontier', referring to the relationship between Uther and Ygerne, suggests wisdom and cunning rather than the use of magic:

A cele feste Uter sacontia oue la femme duk de Cornewaille, Igerne par noun, de la quele après par la cointise Merlin en le chastel de Tyntagel, en Cornewaille, il engendra le noble barun Arthur, a qi toutz les roiaumes decea les mountz puis furent suggetz (London, College of Arms 20/5).

[At this feast, Uther met the wife of the Duke of Cornwall, called Ygerne, by whom later on, through Merlin's cunning, he conceived in the castle of Tintagel in Cornwall the noble and valiant Arthur, who later submitted all kingdoms beyond the mountains.]

The immediate insistence on Arthur's value and later accomplishments tones down the question of his illegitimacy. In BL Add 8101, the struggle of two different dynasties for the throne of Britain appears visually with the representation of roundels for Vortigern and Vortimer after those of Constans, Aurelius and Uther, and before that of Arthur. The lines linking the roundels of Uther and his son Arthur actually cross the roundel of Vortimer, who with his father, interfered in the dynastic succession of the sons of Constantine.

London, College of Arms 20/5 push the roundels for Vortigern and his son even more conspicuously to the left of the roll, a placement usually reserved to the text which marginalizes them, while the central disposition of the roundels for Constantine, his three sons and Arthur stresses their legitimacy as kings of Britain. Both rolls are characterised by the presence of a developed commentary on Arthur's reign, but this passage is not situated, like the others, along the genealogy. Maybe because of its unusual length, it is moved to the other side of the roll, a placement which breaks the traditional chronological order but distinguishes Arthur's reign and highlights its importance.

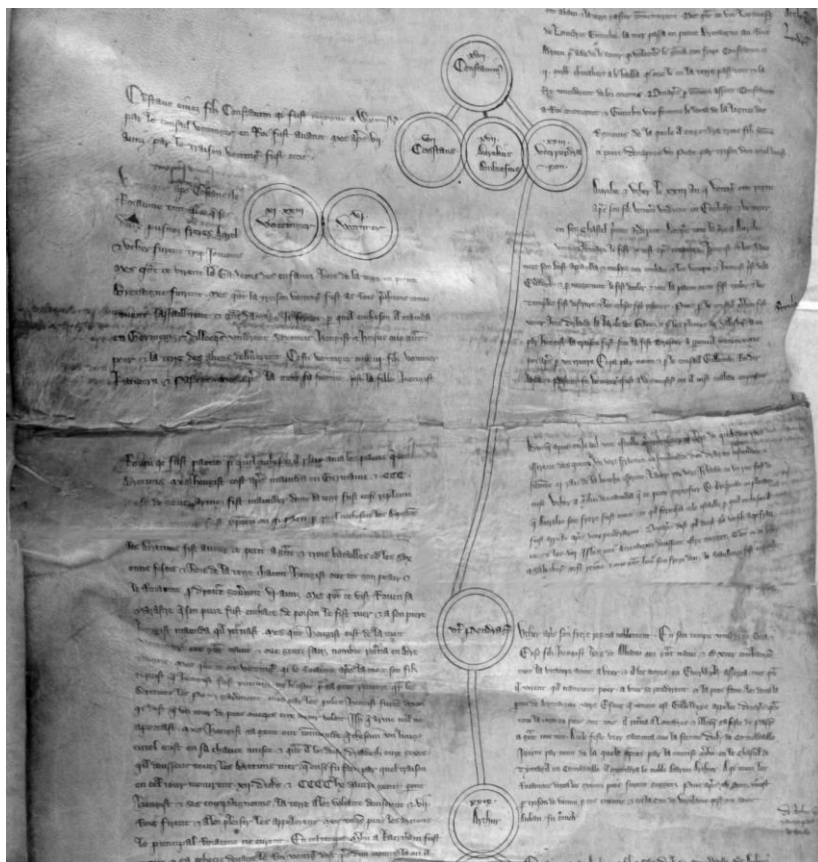


Figure 3: London, College of Arms 20/5



Figure 4: London, College of Arms, 20/2

London, College of Arms, 20/2 (mid 14<sup>th</sup> c.),<sup>50</sup> is more ornate, using blue, green and red paint, along with red ink in some of the medallions and for the initials. It occasionally features roundels with female characters, daughters and spouses (including Ronwen, but not Ygerne). In this roll, Arthur's adulterous conception is clearly stated, by contrast with that of his sister:

*Cist roy engendra Arthur en Ingerne, femme au Gorlois, duk de Corwayle, que surmunta en beauté tuz les femmes de Britaine. Et après la mort Gorlois, la prist a femme et engendrat une fille qe out noun Anne* (London, College of Arms, 20/2).

[This king begat Arthur in Ygerne, wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, who surpassed in beauty all women of Britain. And after the death of Gorlois, he married her and begat a daughter called Anne.]

The courtly reference to Ygerne's beauty, already mentioned in the *Historia*, seems to act as a kind of explanation for the adultery. Despite Arthur's problematic conception, visually, he appears as equal to Anne: their two symmetrical roundels stress their family relationship to Uther, with the statements 'Arthur fu sun fiz' and 'Anna fu sa fille'. The next roundel is circled in blue and written in red ink, to emphasize Arthur's reign, and it adds genealogical information to the notion of political succession: 'Arthur *regna après sun pere* Uterpendragon'. In this roll, Arthur's paternity is on the foreground and enables a smooth succession, despite the extra information provided by the textual commentary to the genealogy. While the first two rolls stress Merlin's intervention and praise Arthur's qualities, the last one presents both Arthur and Anna as Uther's children, passing over the distinctive circumstances of their conception to retain the idea of lineage continuity, a statement reinforced by the visual staging of the genealogies.

The green line running vertically in the centre of London, College of Arms, 20/2 has an esthetical function, as it is placed between in the gutter between the two columns of texts and echoed by two other sets of green and red lines framing the outer sides of the commentaries.

However, its presence stresses the idea of continuity in the succession of the kings of Britain, hiding dynastic ruptures and political rivalries. In this roll, the roundels for Vortigern and Vortimer are thus inserted between those of the two brothers and sons of Constantine, Constans and Aurelius. The vertical green line which connects the medallions and follows the chronological succession of the rulers of Britain is more visually striking than the plainer double lines traced in ink which indicate dynastic relations.

The conception of the famous King Arthur may explain the inclusion of the story of Uther's adultery in British chronicles, despite its transgressive dimension, and may also contribute to legitimate or redeem it in the longer term.<sup>51</sup> In many chronicles, the adultery remains a secret, and Arthur is presented as the legitimate son of Uther and Ygerne, whose wedding is enabled by the duke's expedient death. But in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. prose *Merlin* and in Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica* (1355-69), this problematic conception, which could lead to a depreciation of Arthur's character, paradoxically contributes to the development of his legend, since it leads to the sword in the stone episode which reveals Arthur's divine election. The *Scalacronica* highlights the beneficial result of the intercourse between Uther and Ygerne, presenting Arthur in a heroic fashion: 'Si conceust la dame enfaunt meisme la nuyt, qy puis fust *Arthur ly Vaillaunt*' (f. 68va). However, the final wedding of Uther and Ygerne does not dispel the idea of secrecy and mystery, exposing the duchess's deception:

*Cest aventure n'estoit pas descovry vivaunt Uter. [...] Merlyne atirast quaintement la volounté Igerne. Le roy Uter la prist en espuse, la fist royne. El en avoit grant merveil, supposant bien faucein, que ceo n'estoit pas soun marry q'ele avoit delec luy en Tyntagel, mais el ne savoit my le poynt vivaunt Uter. S, f. 68vb*

[This adventure was not discovered in Uther's lifetime. [...]] Merlyn skillfully manipulated Ygerne's will. King Uther took her as his wife and made her queen. She was marveling at this, suspecting a deception, because it was not her husband that she had next to her in Tintagel, but she did not learn the truth in Uther's lifetime.]

The repetition of 'aventure' points to the supernatural aspect of the story. Contrary to the other historiographical texts derived from the *Historia*, the *Scalacronica* includes, like *Merlin* and its *Sequel*, the episode of the sword in the stone, showing the influence of the romance tradition on the chronicle and Thomas Gray's desire to complete Geoffrey's narrative with other sources.<sup>52</sup> Although Arthur is not adopted but presented as Uther's son, the British barons are suspicious of his paternity and legitimacy, hence the necessity for a miracle establishing his divine election.

Tot tenoit le roy Uter Arthur soun fitz, unqor les grantz du realme *en avoïnt dout*, por ceo que le temps de soun neisement estoit trop près la solempneté du matremoin le roy, et por ceo que *l'aventure n'estoit pas discovert pur l'onor la royne vivaunt le roy...* S, f. 69vb

[Even if King Uther held Arthur as his son, the barons of the kingdom were doubtful about it, since Arthur's birth had been too close to the celebration of the king's wedding, and during the king's lifetime, the adventure was not disclosed, in order to preserve the queen's honour.]

Only after Arthur's success at the sword trial, does Ulfin reveal the circumstances of his conception: 'Adonques fust discovert de Urfyne la maner de soun naisement' (f. 70b). Written by a knight, rather than a clerk, and introduced by a dream vision, this chronicle, which betrays literary aspirations and influences, opens itself to romance when Arthur's birth is presented as a marvelous adventure leading to the miracle of the sword of the stone.<sup>53</sup>

In both chronicles and romances, the story of Uther and Ygerne shows how human desire can threaten social, political and moral order, but the texts deal differently with the didactic or exemplary potential of this problematic episode. The moral condemnation of Uther's adultery with Ygerne appears in the Variant version of the *Historia* and in the *Chroniques des Bretons*, but the transformation which made it possible and demonstrates the enchanter's prodigious gifts is not explicitly condemned as such, and most 14<sup>th</sup> century chronicles and genealogical rolls of the Kings of Britain announce Arthur's glorious future from the

moment of his conception, discarding the question of his illegitimacy to emphasize the dynastic transmission of power, from father to son. The *Scalacronica*, influenced by *Merlin* and its *Sequel*, differs from contemporary chronicles by showing the difficulty of Arthur's accession to the throne, and the damage caused by the suspicion of illegitimacy, but this enables a dramatic revelation of Arthur's origins and divine election.

## Conclusion

The success of Geoffrey's *Historia* throughout the Middle Ages went beyond the wide manuscript transmission of this text. The examination of the story of Uther and Ygerne in its successive French translations and adaptations up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century shows how these historical narratives retain and engage with both dramatic and supernatural elements. It highlights different ways of dealing with a problematic passage, which implies the use of magic, through the ambiguous character of Merlin, and involves a royal adultery raising the political question of illegitimacy. Most adaptors and translators of Geoffrey include this passage and contribute to its diffusion, although it does not appear in Nicolas Trevet's *Cronicles* (14<sup>th</sup> c.), a vernacular universal history which makes a selective use of the *Historia*.<sup>54</sup>

The 12<sup>th</sup> c. versified Anglo-Norman adaptation by Wace for the Plantagenet kings tends to develop the courtly aspect of the story and the marvelous transformation performed by Merlin. This focus on romance and enchantments might explain why after Wace, only later Anglo-Norman prose chronicles started to show an interest in the legendary history of Britain.<sup>55</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> c. prose *Bruts* seems to favour a more condensed and factual historical narrative, although they keep the structure of the episode and the marvel produced by Merlin to help the fulfillment of Uther's desire. For J. Taylor, with the move of the chancery to York at the turn of the century, 'the presence of the royal administration in the North acted as a stimulus to the production of a number of historical writings',<sup>56</sup> including the *Anonimale Chronicle* and Peter of Langtoft's chronicle. In this verse text, as in the prose *Brut*, the wedding and the birth of Arthur provide a swift conclusion, leaving aside moral considerations. The *Petit Brui's* treatment of the episode depreciates

the figure of Uther, who uses scheming and betrayal without presenting the moral repentance suggested by other texts. The importance given to the passage is all the more notable given the abridgement of this text. In parallel with the chronicles tradition, the Anglo-Norman genealogies of the kings of Britain retain the highlights of this complex episode, reaffirming the principle of dynastic succession. The *Scalacronica*'s account of Arthur's conception integrates history and romance, in accordance with their lay author's interest in literary and chivalric culture.

Translating the *Historia* in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. at the court of Burgundy shows the lasting influence and authority of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Using the source text for all vernacular narratives dealing with the matter of Britain enables an exploration of the historical aspect of Arthurian romances.<sup>57</sup> The *Chroniques des Bretons*, transmitted in quality manuscripts, probably aiming at a noble or wealthy audience interested in both chronicles and romances,<sup>58</sup> at a time when the hybridity of literary productions questions genre distinctions,<sup>59</sup> develop the supernatural aspect of a metamorphosis due to the practice of black magic. They also question the transgressive dimension of this royal adultery from both a moral and a legal perspective. Paradoxically, it is the 13<sup>th</sup> c. prose romance of *Merlin* which seems to confront and resolve more directly the guilt of the king and Merlin.

#### Appendix: Medieval French and Anglo-Norman adaptations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (1138)

12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Geoffrey of Monmouth's <i>Historia</i> (1138) Wace's <i>Brut</i> (verse) (1155)
13 <sup>th</sup> c.	<i>Merlin</i> (prose)
14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Anglo-Norman prose <i>Bruts</i> Peter of Langtoft's († 1305) <i>Chronicle</i> (verse) <i>Petit Bruit</i> (prose), 1309 John of Canterbury's <i>Polistorie</i> (prose), 1314 <i>Anonimale Chronicle</i> (prose) Anglo-Norman genealogies of the Kings of Britain (prose) Thomas Gray's <i>Scalacronica</i> (prose) (1355-69)
15 <sup>th</sup> c.	<i>Chroniques des Bretons</i> (prose) (> Jean de Wavrin's <i>Chronique</i> )



## Notes

- 1 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain. An Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum*, ed. M.D. Reeve, trans. N. Wright (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2007).
- 2 E. Faral, *La légende arthurienne. Etudes et documents* (Paris, Champion, 1929), vol. 2, p. 252 ss. The narrative of Arthur's conception introduces echoes of the 'fabliau' or 'vaudeville', in the prose *Merlin* version of the story (13th c.). A. Micha, *Etude sur le Merlin de Robert de Boron* (Genève, Droz, 1980), p. 176. The comical potential was already exploited in its rewriting in Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* (1186). R. Morris, 'Uther and Igerne: A Study in Uncourtly Love', *Arthurian Literature*, 4 (1985), p. 81-82.
- 3 L. Mathey-Maille, 'Le roi Arthur chez Geoffroy de Monmouth et Wace: la naissance du héros', *Arturus Rex, II. Acta Conventus Lovaniensis 1987*, ed. W. Van Hoecke, G. Tournoy and W. Verbeke (Louvain, Leuven UP, 1991), p. 224-26.
- 4 Grisward, Joël. 'Uter Pandragon, Artur et l'idéologie royale des Indo-Européens. Structure trifonctionnelle et roman arthurien', *Le Moyen Age aujourd'hui, Europe*, 654 (1983), p. 111-20.
- 5 D. Boutet, 'De Pandragon et d'Uter à Uterpandragon: mythe, idéologie et construction littéraire dans le *Merlin* de Robert de Boron', *Merlin, roman du XIIIe siècle de Robert de Boron*, dir. D. Quérueu and C. Ferlampin-Acher (Paris, Ellipses, 2000), p. 36.
- 6 O. Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: a Psychological Exploration of Myth*, trans. G.C. Richter and E. James Lieberman (London, Johns Hopkins University Press), 2004 (1909). Mathey-Maille, 1991, p. 227.
- 7 Wace's Roman de Brut, *A History of the British*, ed. and trans. J. Weiss (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2002) [RB].
- 8 Surviving in more than 20 manuscripts, the Variant Version uses supplementary material from the Vulgate, especially in the second part of the poem. *Geoffrey of Monmouth. The Historia Regum Britannie. II, The First Variant Version*, ed. N. Wright (Cambridge, Brewer, 1988), p. lxxvii [VV].
- 9 *Prose Brut to 1332*, ed. H. Pagan (Manchester, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2011).
- 10 Peter of Langtoft, *The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft in French Verse, from the Earliest Period to the Death of King Edward I*, ed. T. Wright (London, Longmans, 1866-68).

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- 11 Jehan de Caunterbire, *Polistorie. A Critical Edition*, ed. W. N. Ferris (PhD thesis, Univ. of N. Carolina, 1963).
  - 12 Only the part from 1066 to 1363 has been edited. Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica: a Chronical of England and Scotland from ADMLXVI to AD MCCCLXII*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh, Maitland Club, 1836) and *Scalacronica 1272-1363*, ed. T. Gray and A. King (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2005). It survives in a single manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 133 [J].
  - 13 Robert de Boron. *Merlin, roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. A. Micha (Genève, Droz, 1979) [M].
  - 14 R. Trachsler, *Merlin l'enchanteur, étude sur le Merlin de Robert de Boron* (Paris, Sedes, 2000), p. 131-34.
  - 15 The *Chroniques des Bretons*, preserved in 4 manuscripts, derive both from the *Historia* and the *Roman de Brut*, mentioning several times 'maistre Gasce'. Our section, ch. 67-68, relies mainly on Geoffrey. R.H. Fletcher, *The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles especially those of Great Britain and France* (Boston, Ginn & Company, 1906) p. 226 and G. Veyssière, *Translator Geoffroy de Monmouth: trois traductions en prose française de l'Historia regum Britannie: XIIIe-XVe siècles* (Thèse, Paris 4, 2002), p. 29 and 112-45.
  - 16 They circulated in Burgundian circles and are reused at the beginning of the Jean de Wavrin's chronicles. Jehan de Wavrin, *Recueil des croniques et anciennes istories de la Grant Bretagne a present nomme Engleterre*, ed. W. Hardy (London, Longman and Green, 1864-91), vol. 1, p. LXIII-LXIV [CB], Fletcher, 1906, p. 226-30, Veyssière, 2002, ch 2-3 and E.D. Kennedy, 'Arthurian History: The Chronicle of Jean de Waurin', *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. G.S. Burgess and K. Pratt (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 497-98.
  - 17 Morris, 1985, p. 70-92.
  - 18 As is the case in our adaptations of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, being faithful to the meaning of the original text can imply insisting on its didactic aim, with rhetorical ornaments aimed at seducing the reader and supporting moral amplifications. C. Buridant, 'Translatio Medievalis. Théorie et pratique de la traduction médiévale', *Travaux de linguistique et littérature*, 21 (1983), p. 81-136.
  - 19 In the *Vulgate Sequel*, the same contorted argument could be used to justify the love spell cast by Merlin on King Ban and the daughter of Agravain des Marais, leading to the conception of the future knight Hector (Pl. p. 1517-26). However, Merlin then takes entire responsibility and his intervention comes from an impulse rather than a long-planned decision.

- 20 L.E. Mitchell, 'Women and Medieval Canon Law', *Women in Medieval Western European Culture* (New York, Garland, 1999), p. 143-156 and F. Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of the Arthurian Legend* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 23.
- 21 Trachsler, 2000, p. 135-42.
- 22 In both cases, the mother is innocent and deceived, the day and hour of the conception is recorded, and both Merlin and Arthur accomplish wonders before the revelation of their extraordinary conception. Boutet, 2000, p. 36-37.
- 23 *Genesis* I, 26-28.
- 24 L. Harf-Lancner, 'Introduction', *Métamorphose et bestiaire fantastique au Moyen Age* (Paris, École normale supérieure de jeunes filles, 1985), p. 4.
- 25 On the vocabulary used in narratives of metamorphosis, referring to movement ('mutare') or to a change of appearances ('forma' and 'figura'), see A. Pairet, *Les Mutacions des fables: figures de la métamorphose dans la littérature française du Moyen Age* (Paris, Champion, 2002), p. 19-30.
- 26 The 'new arts' could also hint to the new magical science introduced in the West by the Latin translation of Greek, Arabic and Hebrew astronomic and medical treatises.
- 27 Wace. *Le Roman de Brut*, 1938, vol. 1, p. 459.
- 28 These two manuscripts often present a shorter version of the text, omitting up to seven lines (ll. 8695-8702) in the passage describing the impregnable Tintagel, where Ygerne is kept. Contrary to J, BNF, fr. 1416, which seems to favour amplification, they prefer abridgment and concision: 'D omet 2000 vers en couplets entre les vers 1 et 12000'. Wace. *Le Roman de Brut*, 1938, vol. 1, p. XXIX.
- 29 Only the later parts of this chronicle (1307-1381) have been edited. *The Anonimale chronicle 1333-1381 from a MS written at St Mary's Abbey, York*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1927) and *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1307 to 1334 from Brotherton Collection MS 29*, ed. and trans. W.R. Childs and J. Taylor (York, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1991). Transcriptions are from BL, Royal 20 A XVIII, which according to Taylor's initial examination 'preserves a better text' than Leeds, UL, Brotherton 29, whose later part was written in the Benedictine abbey of St Mary's in York. J. Taylor, 'The Origins of the Anonimale Chronicle', *Northern History*, 31 (1995), p. 45-64.
- 30 This text survives in a single 16th c. manuscript. In addition to the 'Grant Bruit', it uses romances such as the 'Seint Graal' and 'Launcelet du Lake'. Rauf de Boun. *Le Petit Bruit*, ed. D.B. Tyson (London, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1987).
- 31 This shift is historically significant: 'Merlin appeared just as interest in natural magic and occult powers was growing, but before Church law and

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- theology had been systematized and updated in ways very hostile to magic'. 'The key difference between natural magic and necromancy is that the natural magician respects the boundaries imposed upon human knowledge by God'. Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin the Magician* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012), p. 119-30.
- 32 The style of the *Chroniques* is close to that of prose romances, using 'figure and imaginative touches' and taking us 'into the confidence of the characters'. They describe Uther's love for Ygerne 'with the warmth and in the conventional language of amatory secular literature'. Fletcher, 1906, p. 226-28.
- 33 Jean de Wavrin, who inserts the *Chroniques* at the beginning of his *Recueil des chroniques de la Grande Bretagne* possessed both prose romances and historical texts in the vernacular wanted to write a knightly history for aristocrats interested in romances. A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 288.
- 34 Rauf de Boun, *Le Petit Bruit*, ed. D.B. Tyson (London, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1987), p. 12.
- 35 Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The Historia Regum Britannie*, 1988, p. l-ii.
- 36 Micha, 1980, p. 125 ss.
- 37 Manuscript J, BNF, fr. 1416 adds two slightly redundant lines to the passage: 'Illuec fu Artus engenrés / Qui tant fu preus et redoutés'. Wace. *Le Roman de Brut*, 1938, vol. 1, p. 460.
- 38 Mathey-Maille, 1991, p. 225.
- 39 Veyseyre, 2002, p. 125-32.
- 40 Veyseyre, 2002, p. 442.
- 41 In the prose *Merlin*, which stages several cases of adultery and fornication, there is a striking difference between their consequences, according to the sex and status of the offender (see the story of the daughters of Merlin l'Ancien, *M* 27 and 44-69). Robert de Boron seems ambivalent regarding lust: when he wants to condemn it, he uses technical terms like 'luxure', from a religious and moral perspective, or 'avoutire', from a judicial perspective, but when he wants to excuse it, he uses euphemisms like the verbs 'gesir' and 'couchier'. C. Blons-Pierre, 'Les enjeux de la luxure dans le *Merlin* de Robert de Boron', *Merlin, roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, dir. D. Quérueu and C. Ferlampin-Acher (Paris, Ellipses, 2000), p. 75.
- 42 Fletcher, 1906, p. 227.
- 43 'La mort du bon duc Gorlois [...] luy atendry le cuer... Mais toustefois son cuer quy estoit en Tintagol, non obstant quelconques apparence de courroux le mettoit en souveraine joye'. *CB* p. 342-43.

- 44 *Le livre du Graal. I, Joseph d'Arimathie, Merlin, Les premiers faits du roi Arthur*, dir. D. Poirion and P. Walter, ed. A. Berthelot, R. Deschaux, I. Freire-Nunes et al. (Paris, Gallimard, 2001).
- 45 There is no sin in the conception of Arthur in that the adultery obeys a superior necessity, according to plans of the divine Providence. Boutet, 2000, p. 35.
- 46 See Merlin's statement: 'tu as fait molt bele fin, se la *conscience* est tele come la *semblance*', *Mp.* 260.
- 47 O. de Laborderie, '*Ligne de reis*': *culture historique, représentation du pouvoir royal et construction de la mémoire nationale en Angleterre à travers les généalogies royales en rouleau du milieu du XIIIe siècle au début du XVe siècle* (Thèse, Paris, EHESS, 2002), t. 4 p. 1204 and t. 5 p. 1418-19.
- 48 Laborderie (de), 2002, t. 4 p. 1236 and t. 5 p. 1412-13.
- 49 Laborderie (de), 2002, t. 5 p. 1373-74.
- 50 Laborderie (de), 2002, t. 4 p. 1096 and t. 5 p. 1410-11.
- 51 Wace's insistence makes 'Ygerne's conception and bearing of Arthur her primary function', 'portraying her as a passive and fearful female', while in Geoffrey, she 'enjoys a royal marriage based upon mutual love and shared power'. Tolhurst, 2012, p. 57-58.
- 52 It is the first inclusion of the sword in the stone episode in a historical text. Thomas Gray gives a preeminent place to Arthur in his own chronicle, although he is aware of his absence in Bede and he includes marvellous aspects absent in Geoffrey, like the mention of Arthur's possible return: 'bien püst estre qe Bede ne voloit rementouier ses gestez pur ceo qe tauntz estoient *vayns faves et mervailous*, que autres n'en prissent ensauple ne creascent *tiels fantasies* [...] *lez queux sont mervailous et doutous a croire* as tiels saintz gentz...' *S*, f. 82b. His aristocratic audience would have been able to read continental romances and was probably familiar with them. R.J. Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Later Medieval England* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 31-32 and 53 and J. Spence, *Reimagining History in Anglo-Norman Prose Chronicles* (Woodbridge, York Medieval Press, 2013), p. 64-72.
- 53 The will of Thomas Gray's daughter, Elizabeth Darcy, written in 1412, mentions two books a 'Sainz Ryall' and a 'Lanselake', probably inherited from her father. The Holy Grail could refer to a volume including both the *Estoire del saint Graal*, *Merlin* and its *Sequel*, as it was a frequent manuscript combination. Such a collection appears in Cambridge, University Library, Add. 7071, copied in England around 1300.
- 54 *The Anglo-Norman chronicle of Nicolas Trivet: Text, with Historical, Philological and Literary Study*, ed. Rutherford (PhD thesis, University of London, 1932).

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- 55 Spence, 2013, p. 46.
- 56 Taylor, 1995, p. 48-49.
- 57 Veysseyre, 2002, p. 441-42.
- 58 A few references in chapter 96 concerning the final fight between Arthur and Mordred show that the author of the *Chroniques des Bretons* knew *la Mort le roi Artu*. Veysseyre, 2002, p. 145.
- 59 In Burgundian literature, 'the historic-realist romances have many features in common with the chronicles and chivalric biographies of the period': they were 'just as concerned with the commemoration of the deeds of the supposed ancestors of their audience', despite differences in their writing style. R. Brown-Grant, 'Narrative style in Burgundian prose romances of the later Middle Ages', *Romania*, 130 (2) (2012), p. 354-406 and 'Narrative style in Burgundian chronicles of the later Middle Ages', *Viator* 42 (2) (2011), p. 233-82.